

A range extension for Ankober Serin *Serinus ankoberensis*

Anteneb Shimelis

Serinus ankoberensis était au paravant considéré comme endémique pour deux sites d'Ankober escarpés dans le centre des régions montagneuses d'Éthiopie, et restreint à se situer entre 2,900–3,250 mètres. Certaines observations faites par l'équipe Ethiopian Important Bird Areas et un ornithologiste suédois ont, depuis décembre 1996, confirmés que l'espèce s'est considérablement répandu, et bien plus qu'auparavant, à l'intérieur de la province de Shoa, et serait également recherché dans l'adjacent Tigray. Il a été localisé dans deux IBAs—le Simien Mountains National Park et le Guasa Réserve—et aussi dans deux nouveaux sites proche de ce type de localité. On sait maintenant que son altitude vitale peut varier entre 2,600–4,250 mètres.

Ankober Serin *Serinus ankoberensis* is a recently described cliff-frequenting montane finch previously considered endemic to a tiny area of the central highlands of Ethiopia¹. It was known from two sites in Shoa province, at 2,900–3,250 m, on the edge of the eastern escarpment of the western highland massif of Ethiopia: one, 3–8 km north of Ankober (09°36'N 39°46'E), where it is considered to be restricted to an area of not more than 5 km², and the other, 3–4 km from Tarma Ber, above and south of Debre Sina town^{2,3}.

Although apparently suitable habitat exists nearby³ and at similar altitudes in many other areas of Ethiopia, no records of the species away from these two localities had been made until 3 December 1996, when a Swede—Håkan Pohlstrand—saw four birds in the Simien Mountains National Park, by the road five km west of Chennek camp at 3,500 m, and subsequently photographed a flock of at least 50 birds on a cliff ledge two km north of Bhawit at 4,250 m on 6 March 1997 (*Bull. ABC* 4: 144). This finding, which was repeated during a survey of the park on 20–27 March 1998, constituted a considerable extension of the species' known range. Additional surveys of other suitable areas since late 1997 have confirmed the species to be more widespread than previously thought.

Survey expeditions, in August 1997, by the Ethiopian Important Bird Area (IBA) Project team discovered two new sites in the vicinity of the two previous confirmed localities: at Goshmeda and Kundi (09°39'N 39°45'E). From their observations, the IBA team considered it possible that the species might also be found at Tarma Ber and further north, and at other, ecologically similar sites, eg Guasa Reserve and Simien Mountains National Park (both IBAs).

In order to search for additional populations of the species north of the type-locality (the Ankober Escarpment), in April 1998 the IBA team thoroughly surveyed almost all of Guasa Reserve (10°17'N–10°26'N and 39°47'E–39°48'E) over a period of c2 weeks and recorded over 100

birds in a very small area (10°22'N–10°23'N and 39°45'E–39°45'E) around Koreta (Korate) at 3,250 m. Common plant species in this area were *Festuca macrophylla*, *Thymus* sp, *Kniphofia foliosa* and short highland grasses.

Guasa Reserve is in the Gera Keya District of north Shoa province (part of Amhara National Regional State), c280 km from Addis Ababa and 150 km from Debre Birhan, the capital of Shoa province. The reserve, which is situated in the Afro-alpine Agroclimatic zone (mean altitude 3,200 m), covers c10,000 ha and is not officially protected but is owned by the state, who have leased the rights of use to the local community. No proposal has been designated by the government regarding the conservation of the site. The community, which is organised into local administrative structures (peasant associations), utilises the area sustainably by restricting and controlling grazing, and cutting of Guasa grass *Festuca macrophylla*.

Collection of raptors' eggs, habitat fragmentation, agricultural extension, introduction of alien plant species, eg *Eucalyptus globulus* and *Cupressus lucitanica* and development schemes (sheep farming and forestation) constitute some of the threats to the area.

On 27 May 1998, the IBA survey team paused at Deneba Wereda (north Shoa province) between the Wekolo and Lemi Peasant Associations (38°57'N 09°47'E), five km from Lemi Village and 65 kms from Alem Ketema. From previous experience of the habitat of the species, it appeared that the area might hold Ankober Serin. A short search of the area resulted in the discovery of 13 Ankober Serin just 100 m from the main road. The altitude at this locality is c2,600 m, probably the lowest recorded for the species. The site is similar to other known sites for the bird and is situated next to the all-weather road linking Addis Ababa and Alem Ketema via Muketuri.

This discovery suggests that the species might possibly be found in all ecologically similar habitats throughout the highland massifs of Amhara Regional State and parts of Tigray. It is unknown whether the species was formerly more widely distributed and considerable effort will be required to accurately establish the range of *S. ankoberensis*. It is hoped that the IBA team or others will be able to explore other suitable areas in due course, in order to plot the distribution, assess the population size and identify any possible threats to this little-known species. ☛

References

1. Ash, J.S. 1979. A new species of serin from Ethiopia. *Ibis* 121: 1-7.
2. Collar, N.J., Crosby, M.J. and Stattersfield, A.J. 1994. *Birds to watch 2: the world list of threatened birds*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.
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